

A Town Hall Working Group Update

The Town Hall Working Group has spent the last few months discussing and debating many real issues and many potential issues related to renovating, replacing and or re-locating our Town Hall building.

It is important to note that this group was established by the Town Manager as an *advisory group* and is open to any interested citizens who want to participate. It was not set up to work in privacy or in a vacuum. Regular attendees include representation from the Planning Board, the Board of Selectman, the Ad Com, the Ad Hoc Committee, the Permanent Building Committee; Town Hall Departments- including Town Clerk, Finance, Building, DPW and citizens with no affiliation to any committee, group or Town department.

The Group initially looked at the studies that have already been performed and then began the process of identifying and reducing the number of viable options for this project. The Working Group has not always agreed on every issue but the process has been a fair and reasonable forum for ideas and opinions to be heard. Following the initial phase of the review the Working Group felt that it was important to establish a goal and a timeline to achieve that goal. After some debate, the direction that has been pursued is to develop a basis for requesting funds from a Special Town Meeting in November 2014 to pay for “Soft Costs” or Architectural Fees to design a solution for a New Town Hall. The process and timeline is as follows:

- Identify any possible building sites that may be raised by residents
- Rule out sites based on cost, feasibility, location, etc.
- Narrow the list of possible sites to two options and ask for community preference
- Audit existing departments to verify operational space needs (not wants)
- Identify possible funding source(s)
- Prepare a “Request for Proposal” by August 2014 that could be circulated to architectural firms to determine “true cost” estimates to design this Project
- Circulate the RFP through the State’s Central Register by early September 2014
- Conduct Public outreach to discuss proposal options and costs throughout September and leading up to November 2014
- Present an Article for Town Meeting funding for the Soft Costs at a Special Town Meeting in November 2014

Throughout the months of May, June and July the Group identified about 6-8 viable sites that were then evaluated using a weighted scale. Sites were then eliminated from further consideration due to cost, feasibility, location, etc. It is admitted that one of the most significant considerations for removing site options was cost. It was the collective opinion of the Working Group that it did not make sense to spend \$1-2 million dollars to acquire land or sites when viable town-owned property was already available. Through this process of elimination, two sites emerged as the preferred options from the Working Group’s perspective. The two preferred sites were the existing Town Hall site located at 40 South Street and the former State Hospital Auditorium land located at Payson Road behind the new Public Safety Building.

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The Group felt that the Payson Rd. site was interesting in that it offered the Town the option of creating a municipal campus on public land that has very limited taxing potential. The perspective was that since the State Deed Restrictions on the property limits the ability of this land to be developed privately that the development of a New Town Hall at this location would coincidentally, also allow the Town to take down the former State Auditorium structure and address the on-going disrepair of this building. A New Town Hall could be built on this site with room for future expansion (if ever needed) while existing Town Hall operations could continue at 40 South Street during the construction phase. Thus, this option seemed like one of the most viable for limiting the relocation of Town Hall to one move during and after construction. The added benefit, it was perceived, was that the existing Town Hall site could then possibly be sold, re-developed and then placed on the tax rolls.

From a purely economic perspective Working Group members felt that this option offered the Town the prospect of potentially saving \$300,000-\$500,000 in temporary relocation costs while also adding the potential of \$50,000-\$100,000 in new tax revenue each year. Over a span of twenty (20) years, this could equate to added revenue of \$1.5 Million dollars. The net taxing impact of this site would largely depend on what type of re-development occurred at the 40 South Street location. It was also pointed out that the actual sale of the Town Hall site could command an additional value estimated to be at \$1 Million dollars.

The final thought was that a new development, on prime real estate in the center of Town, could potentially do more to support downtown business revitalization than the present Town Hall use.

Understandably, the Working Group spent a lot of time debating the issue of where should Town Hall sit, based on the financial considerations applied to the Payson Road location. However, despite this consideration, the Group recognized and respected the fact that keeping Town Hall at 40 South St was an emotional and a historical decision for the Town. As such, the Group concluded that it might be best to layout the pros and cons of both sites and then let the voters decide through a non-binding referendum what the preferred site should be.

However, the next few steps in the review process were decisive in helping to clarify the site identification question. The two site options were presented to the Planning Board on July 10, 2014. During that meeting it was the majority consensus of the Planning Board that Town Hall should remain at the present 40 South Street location. Some of the reasoning offered by the Planning Board was that the Town had recently completed a major update to the Town's Master Plan. It was their opinion, based on survey data that was collected as part of the update process, that the community preferred to have Town Hall remain near the Town Common. Generally, it was suggested that if the Town Hall were to leave the Common area, this might lead to further deterioration of the downtown business district.

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Following the input from the Planning Board, the option of holding a Special Election within the State Election in November was presented to the Board of Selectmen for their consideration on July 22, 2014. The Town Manager explained that as part of that Special Election, a non-binding referendum question could be placed on the ballot asking voters for their input regarding site preference. However, following a lengthy discussion by the Board and after hearing citizen input advocating for the Town Hall to remain at 40 South Street, the Board of Selectmen voted 4-0-1 to keep the Town Hall at its present location. Board Members cited several reasons for keeping the Town Hall site at 40 South Street. Most prominent in their reasoning was their respect for the process that had been recently completed with the Master Plan update. While it was recognized that a specific question was never asked of the public regarding an alternative Town Hall site location, Board members reasoned and recognized that changing the location was an emotional issue that could add a new debate to the long-standing challenge of supporting the bigger issue of the repair or replacement of the existing Town Hall.

Based on the input of both the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen, the Working Group has now set out to focus its attention on the 40 South Street site. The Group is focused on sorting out the development options of (1) building a new building in the rear of the existing Town Hall parking lot, or (2) perform a significant or “gut rehab” of the existing Town Hall building or (3) raze the existing Town Hall building completely and construct a new building at this same location. The Group has already identified the challenge with the latter two (2) options in that this will require the temporary relocation of Town Hall Offices to an alternative location during construction. It remains unclear at this time if constructing a new building in the rear parking lot will require relocation of the Town Hall during construction. To limit cost and disruption to Town services, the Working Group would prefer not to relocate Town Hall during construction, if this is at all possible. The Group continues to explore all options and will be making its recommendation(s) in the coming weeks.

If the option to build in the Town Hall parking lot is selected, it is important to note that there will likely be some short-term repair costs that will be required to make sure that the Town Hall work environment remains safe and dry for employees. This is important so that employees can continue to perform their duties at this location for the next 2-3 years while a New Town Hall is designed and built.

In preparation for this next phase, the Working Group has conducted test borings in the parking lot and they have done some investigative structural testing at the existing Town Hall. The test borings in the parking lot revealed preliminarily that construction in this area is possible. The structural testing at Town Hall indicated that the present building was determined structurally sufficient for the next 2-3 years if a new building was approved. However, other repairs to the roof and the outside brick walls are imminent to head off further water damage to the building.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for Soft Cost estimates is presently being developed by Working Group Members and is planned to go out for consideration in September. It is important to understand what *soft costs* are and the role that it plays in the development

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process. Soft Costs are all costs not directly related to the physical construction of the building. These costs often include for example- architectural, engineering, development of detailed specifications, project management, legal, insurance, advertising and environmental studies. Soft Costs can also include other pre and post construction items such as temporary offices, moving etc.

The Town Manager has been participating in all of the meetings with the Working Group since they began. It will be his recommendation to the Board of Selectmen that the Town seek the funding for the Soft Costs at the upcoming Special Town Meeting (likely to be called) in mid November. Soft Cost funding is critical to engage a professional architectural firm who will then be able to take all the information gathered through the various studies and information collected by the Working Group. This information will then be used to create conceptual plans and elevations that meet the requirements of the current edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code. Following this step, it will then be possible to present clear plans and specifications to the public for their review and comment. Once a conceptual design plan is approved, the Architect can then move onto the next phase of plan development and go out to bid to identify the “real time” cost of construction. The Working Group estimates that a request for funding of this construction proposal will be presented to Special Town Meeting in the Fall of 2015.

For further information, a link has been established on the right side pane of the home page on the Town’s Web Site (www.foxboroughma.gov). Residents can view this site for further information under news and announcements to get updates regarding progress of the Working Group. We hope to provide weekly updates such as notes, reports, plans etc. as more information becomes available.

It is the goal of this Group to present to voters a Town Hall building option that provides a safe and reasonable work environment for employees while meeting the expectations of voters to build it at a reasonable cost. The Working Group is committed to constructing a building that will not only serve today’s needs but also the needs of the future.

A critical component of this planning has been the discussion of how to maintain a New Town Hall once it has been completed. The Group is in complete agreement that a new Town and School wide facilities department needs to be established. The Town Manager has committed to the Working Group that he has embraced this concept and is actively pursuing this function for the next fiscal year. The concept is that this new department will be responsible for all regular and preventive maintenance, deferred maintenance and all future repairs of all town and school buildings.

If anyone would like to observe the discussions of the Working Group, our meetings are posted publicly. The Group meets every other Tuesday at the Boyden Public Library on Tuesday afternoons between the hours of 4:30 to 6:30 P.M.

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Respectfully submitted:

The Regular Members of the Working Group:

William “Bill” G. Keegan, Jr., Town Manager

David Feldman, Member Board of Selectmen

Robert “Bob” Cutler, Town Clerk

William “Bill” Yukna, Permanent Building Committee

Richard “Dick” Heydecker, Resident, Ad Hoc Committee

Randy Scollins, Finance Director

Roger Hill, DPW Director

William “Bill” Casbarra, Building Commissioner

John Rhoads, Planning Board

Sharon Wason, Town Planner

Thom Freeman, Advisory Committee

John “Jack” Schleyer, Resident, Ad Hoc Committee

Ken Elovitz, Resident, Ad Hoc Committee